

Yigael Yadin: the theoretician of Israel's Masada death cult

by Carole Greene and Allen Douglas

Unlike some of the cranks featured on the pages of *Biblical Archaeology Review*, Yigael Yadin is one of the best-known figures in Israel, and one who has been most important in steering Israel away from David Ben-Gurion's conception of a technology-proud independent nation-state toward becoming an Oriental cult-territory.

After having served as chief of staff in Israel's first post-independence army, Yadin, deploying his teams of archaeologists, became the game-master for the most insidious brainwashing operation in the country's early history: the fetishism of the site of Masada, the place where Jewish Zealots committed mass suicide in the face of a Roman invasion in the first century A.D. Yadin had thus from early days of Israeli history been the proponent of that conception of "Jewish survival" that is diametrically opposed to the principles of moral and cultural excellence that have allowed Jews, and the state of Israel as well, to survive.

The fact that Yadin was lavishly praised in a May 8 *New York Times* feature has relevance to his active role in Israel's political process. Highly placed Israeli sources report that Yadin is active in behind-the-scenes discussions in Israel's Knesset, or parliament, shaping the government that will emerge after Israel's July elections.

There is a dangerous precedent for Yadin's involvement in such negotiations. In the mid-1970s, at the same time that Yadin was composing a Hebrew-language cult-compendium on "rebuilding Solomon's Temple," he was putting together a political movement under the Hebrew acronym DASH, or, Democratic Movement for Change. This anti-growth, proto-fascist party, which recalls the work of George McGovern and Gary Hart in the United States, drew together high-level military-intelligence and British-connected political figures, with the purpose and result of smashing the three-decades-old Labour Party-centered coalitions that had ruled Israel since 1948.

Yadin's chief collaborators then and now include Ariel Sharon, former Defense Minister Ezer Weizman, and Yuval Ne'eman. These men represent the hard core of British influence in Israel, committed to turning Israel into an inferno of blood-and-soil cults modeled on the projected fantasies of the British ruling class.

This is the passion behind Yadin's pagan worship of the Third Temple.

Through popularizing the Dead Sea sect—the Essenes—and their Manichean vision of a "War of the Sons of Light Against the Sons of Darkness," Yadin has in effect proposed dividing the Middle East into two armed camps, with the Israelis prepared for a holy war strengthened by the knowledge that they are the "Sons of Light." It was Yadin's popularization of Armageddon that lay behind the recent statement by a terrorist, arrested trying to get into the tunnels under the Temple Mount to sacrifice a one-day-old lamb, that he was motivated by his desire "to bring about the War of Gog and Magog."

Pagan roots

Yadin's role in replacing Judaism with pagan fanaticism was prepared for him by his father, E. L. Sukenik, who was employed on behalf of British Museum circles and their associates in the United States to gather evidence to prove that ancient synagogues in Greece and Palestine were representative of the surrounding Mediterranean culture of paganism at the time, featuring the Zodiac of astrological signs and other symbols of idol worship. Sukenik's argument was that not only were the symbols of Isis-worship present, they were present at the *express consent* of the elders, the Sanhedrin. He argued that since the Sanhedrin were on good terms with the Romans, they could have removed these pagan symbols without political penalty. Giving the Schweich Lectures before the British Academy in 1931 (as his son was to do 30 years later), Sukenik elaborated his vision of early Jewish culture as reflected in synagogues:

The motifs occurring in synagogue art are included for the most part under the categories of Biblical, astral (Zodiac), or magical, and prophylactic (hexagram, pentagram, Heracleon knot . . .) motifs. Although it cannot be proved that the latter were consciously employed as *apotropaea* [a ritual designed to avert evil], there is a considerable amount of probability in its favor, for the prevalence even among official Jewish circles in the Talmudic period of beliefs in evil spirits

and black magic, and in means of frustrating and escaping their actions, requires no proof for anyone familiar with the Rabbinical literature. And Holy Places are notoriously a particularly attractive target for devils and sorcerers.

It is true that from Biblical times to the Talmudic era . . . the doctrine tried to gain acceptance that Israel, or at least the pious Jew, was not subject to the influence of the heavenly bodies, but such influence was not denied in principle.

Sukenik's leading employer was Cyrus Adler, the American expert on Assyrian and Babylonian paganism. The founder of the American Jewish Committee, Adler's "theoretical work" was reflected during the 1930s when he led that organization in a bitter fight against American Jews organizing a mass boycott of Hitler.

Adler was otherwise an important adjunct in America of British *Hofjuden* ("court Jew") circles such as Baron Edmund de Rothschild, Solomon Schechter, and Claude Montefiore, with whom he would stay for extended periods on his frequent visits to London. At the advice of these same friends he launched the *Jewish Quarterly* to create a "revolution in Jewish culture in America." To the same ends, he founded Dropsie College in Philadelphia as a "non-denominational" school, specializing in Semitic culture.

Yadin writes a eulogy to his father's work in an introduction to Hershel Shanks's book, *Judaism in Stone*. Shanks and Yadin have spent hours in meetings at Yadin's house planning out the next phases of the operation to "rebuild Solomon's Temple."

Yadin's excavations

The three nodal points of Yadin's cultural career are his excavation of the Masada fortress; his popularization of the Dead Sea Sect, whose manual is "The War of the Sons of Light Against the Sons of Darkness"; and his most recent, post-1967 work on the Temple Scroll, a manual for reorganizing Israel around a rebuilt Third Temple.

The first of these projects developed after his early 1950s retirement from the military. During a year-long stay in London at the house of Lord Sieff, the plans were laid for the 1955-58 Edmond de Rothschild dig of the mountaintop fortress of Masada—the expedition being named after its financial angel. The dig relied heavily on the logistical backup of the Israeli Defense Forces. It was conducted as a mass spectacle involving a substantial portion of the Israeli population. To this day, elite units of the IDF are sworn in on Masada.

The procedure Yadin used, digging and reconstructing on a large scale at the same time, was most unorthodox, prompting some observers to ask: "Why dig at all? Just rebuild." And as one professional archaeologist noted about all of Yadin's work: "There are yet to be any scholarly writings

about Yadin's activities, in a way that would let other professionals go over them, check their accuracy, and perhaps develop them further. As soon as he's finished with one place, he charges off to another."

In 1961, Yadin began to concentrate on his "War of the Sons of Light against the Sons of Darkness" project.

The *Jewish Encyclopedia* has this to say about the Dead Sea Sect, who considered themselves to be the Sons of Light:

Also called the Judaeen Desert Sect. Name given to a Jewish community that existed in the period of the Second Temple . . . adopting a strict and separatist way of life, espoused a fundamentalist religious world outlook.

Its views—the sect was an extremist offshoot of the Jewish apocalyptic movement, whose basic doctrine was the expectation of the end of days. Until that time wickedness would prevail under the "dominion of Belial," but preceding the advent of the "final era," God would raise up for himself a community of elect who were destined to be saved from the divine visitation and this elect was the "righteous" and the nucleus of the society of the future.

According to its doctrine, God had decreed not only the end but the division of mankind into two antagonistic camps called "those in the lot of light and those in the lot of darkness . . . each camp led by a superhuman figure"; the "prince of light" and the "angel of darkness" respectively.

According to their Manual of Discipline for the Future Congregation of Israel, the sect would be the "leaders and princes." The people would be purged of their wicked leaders who misled it. At the head of the future ruling class would be two Messiahs: the priest and the prince.

The future community of *Israel would be a fighting society which would execute the divine plan.*

The name of Ezer Weizman's heavily military party, which may command a crucial swing margin in the upcoming July elections precisely as Yadin's DASH party did in 1976-77, is the Yahad—the term signifying the community of the elect of the Sons of Light, who, it should be noted, were as fanatically opposed to those regarded as traitors in their own faction as they were to the Sons of Darkness.

In 1967, Yadin took this outlook directly into the realm of the Third Temple, acquiring the so-called Temple Scroll, one of the Dead Sea scrolls dealing with the rituals and physical dimensions of Solomon's Temple. His translation and comments will be issued in English in book form this year, intersecting the efforts of the Jerusalem Temple Mount Foundation—a group Yadin claims to abhor—to rebuild the Temple.